

VZCZCXRO9273
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0967/01 1800901
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 290901Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8644
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1289
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000967

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/28/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: FBI DIRECTOR EXPLORES COUNTERTERRORISM
COOPERATION WITH GOL OFFICIALS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (S) FBI Director Mueller on June 26 met with Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr, Minister of Interior Hassan Sabaa, Head of the Internal Security Forces Ashraf Rifi, Minister of Justice Charles Rizk, and Chief Prosecutor Jean Fahd to offer FBI assistance to Lebanon's security services and judiciary. Mueller encouraged his GOL contacts to allow international access to individuals arrested in Lebanon so that other countries can track and stop international terrorist activities. GOL officials expressed differing opinions about whether the militants fighting in Nahr al-Barid and those perpetrating attacks around the country are Al-Qaida or fighters manipulated by Iran, Syria, or Hizballah. They all agreed, however, that more attacks are likely, and greater international assistance would strengthen Lebanon's security services. End summary.

GOL WILLING TO SHARE EVIDENCE
AND EVENTUALLY DETAINEES

2. (S) FBI Director Mueller, Ambassador Feltman, and Legatt on June 26 met with Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr, Minister of Interior Hassan Sabaa, Head of the Internal Security Forces Ashraf Rifi, Minister of Justice Charles Rizk, and Chief Prosecutor Jean Fahd. Mueller expressed his condolences for Lebanon's loss of life in recent bombings, assassinations, and the ongoing battle in Nahr al-Barid; he offered FBI assistance to Lebanon's security services and judiciary in order to strengthen the rule of law and prevent a security deterioration in Lebanon.

3. (S) Mueller encouraged his GOL contacts to share internationally the fingerprints, explosives samples, and evidence gathered in its counter-terrorism operations, and to allow international access to individuals arrested in Lebanon so that the United States and other countries can track and stop their international activities. Murr told us that the MOD is keeping samples of explosive devices as well as all documents and computers found in Nahr al-Barid. Murr, Sabaa, and Rifi were amenable to sharing evidence for analysis to help cross-border efforts to catch regionally active terrorists. International cooperation on investigations is essential, Fahd agreed, since terrorists are operating internationally.

14. (S) Allowing international access to detainees is more difficult than sharing evidence, our GOL contacts explained. Until Lebanon's investigations are complete, foreign governments can only provide a list of questions for the Lebanese to use in interrogations. Once the legal investigation is complete, however, the prosecutor and the Minister of Justice have the authority to receive and adjudicate requests for extradition or deportation. Their recommendation then requires the signature of both the Prime Minister and President before the prisoner can be transferred, Fahd told Mueller. The MOJ is paralyzed by the political situation, and daily discovers new conflicts and obstructionist procedures, Rizk noted, making informal information-sharing agreements difficult. The Saudi Embassy has already asked for access to Saudis arrested, Fahd told us, because they suspect those arrested have information about plots overseas.

15. (S) The LAF G-2 or Directorate of Intelligence is currently holding at least 55 prisoners held in connection with operations in Nahr al-Barid or other Fatah al-Islam related arrests, our contacts told us, although many of those held are supporters or facilitators rather than fighters. Eighty percent of those arrested are Lebanese, Fahd told us, in addition to a "cocktail" of Saudis, an Iraqi, a Moroccan, an Algerian, a Tunisian, a Bangladeshi, a Chechnyan, and others. The military court has authority over all security and terrorism cases, although the government has the authority to transfer any case involving state security to the Higher Court of Justice; Fahd will retain control of the Fatah al-Islam case until the GOL appoints a prosecutor and transfers the case to the Higher Court.

GOL OFFICIALS BLAME AL-QAIDA,
IRANIAN AND SYRIAN PROXIES

BEIRUT 00000967 002 OF 003

16. (S) GOL officials had differing theories about who is behind the violence in Nahr al-Barid, the attack on UNIFIL, and recent assassinations. Murr told us he believes that the militants in Nahr al-Barid include Al-Qaida fighters from Afghanistan and Iraq mobilized unknowingly by the Syrian security services. The majority of those arrested say they were came to create an Islamic state in north Lebanon, or to attack UNIFIL, Murr told us, while only the top tier were aware of a direct link with Syria. Murr went on to describe Al-Qaida fighters as proxies financed by Iran to hit US interests and EU member state troops in UNIFIL via a Sunni cutout, enabling Hizballah to retain its image as a Lebanese resistance organization. Murr went on to explicitly link Hizballah to the UNIFIL bombing, arguing that no attack could take place in the Hizballah-dominated south without the group's observation if not execution, and that Hizballah had been threatened by Spanish troops' aggressive patrols, which actively searched for Hizballah's arms caches. Finally, Murr observed that similar techniques were used in the Eido and Tueni assassinations, the UNIFIL attack, and his own attempted assassination.

17. (S) Sabaa and Rifi more generally condemned Iran, Syria, their Lebanese allies, and Al-Qaida for various security disruptions, and vowed that the March 14 coalition will fight Lebanon's political and terrorist enemies "to the end." They cited circumstantial evidence and public statements to blame "the Lebanese allies of Iran and Syria" for the attack on UNIFIL, and noted that Hizballah has the most to lose from UNIFIL's presence in the south, giving it the motivation to attack.

MORE ATTACKS LIKELY;
MORE ASSISTANCE NEEDED

18. (S) With five or six cells arrested recently, there are

many more cells outside Nahr al-Barid and more and larger terrorist attacks are likely, the security officials agreed. Where terrorists once viewed Lebanon as a place for transit and training, Lebanon is now a key target for attacks. The camps are like the safe haven cities, Murr worried; the terrorists are likely to respond massively to the loss of a safe haven. GOL officials sought Mueller's advice on how best to prevent terrorist attacks.

¶9. (S) American training and support have already benefited Lebanon's security services, officials told us, but more help is needed. The ISF with international assistance has become more professional and cable, Rifi told us; its success in investigating the mid-March Ain Alaq bus bombings led to the current action against Fatah al-Islam. With increased professionalism, public perceptions of the ISF as a Sunni-dominated security service are slowly changing. Hizballah has stated publicly that the ISF serves all confessions, and neighborhoods where the ISF is posted are starting to realize that their presence is helpful.

¶10. (S) Fahd viewed the security services as hindered by a lack of resources as well as the political situation, and expressed an interest in greater assistance. While rules and procedures exist for investigations, in reality inadequate investigation resources and training prevent the Lebanese from following international best practices.

¶11. (S) Finally, our GOL contacts admitted that Lebanon is struggling to come up with a politically acceptable system to monitor the entrance of Gulf Arabs into the country without deterring Arab tourism, investment, and political support. Sabaa and Murr told us that while many of the terrorists presumably entered Lebanon via the Syrian land or sea border, some of the Saudis arrested entered Lebanon via the airport where they, like most Arabs, were not required to obtain visas. (Note: Prime Minister Hariri in 2002 instituted a policy of allowing Gulf Arabs into Lebanon without visas; Hariri believed the security risk of allowing Arabs in unchecked was small compared to the economic benefits of increased tourism and investment. End Note.)

¶12. (S) Since they used false documents, even a visa system would not necessarily have flagged them as dangerous travelers, Sabaa noted. Murr explained that the cabinet in late June agreed to review the policy and discuss creating a specialized visa bureau in each country to help potential

BEIRUT 00000967 003 OF 003

tourists and investors, but right now there is not a consensus to overturn the policy, and instead the cabinet will next discuss ways to exclude undesirable entrants without a visa system. Sabaa also indicated that the GOL is working back channels with the Gulf countries to ensure they are prepared for a change in the policy.
FELTMAN